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THE U.S. IN HONDURAS **MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF FR. CARNEY**

**GEORGE BLACK AND
ANNE NELSON**

Last September 19 the Honduran armed forces staged an elaborate press conference in Nueva Palestina, a ramshackle jungle settlement in Olancho province, just thirty miles from the Nicaraguan border, to announce that its counter-insurgency forces had liquidated a ninety-six-strong guerrilla column. Killed at the head of the column the previous evening, according to Maj. Leonel Luque, commander of the army's task force, was José Maria Reyes Mata, Honduras's most celebrated Marxist. Reyes Mata's killing, which broke the back of the guerrilla resistance, brought the total of dead subversives to thirty-eight. Not all had died in battle; ten were said to have starved in the jungle after military intelligence detected them and the army cut off their food supply. Among the latter was a 58-year-old American Jesuit from St. Louis, the Rev. James Francis (Guadalupe) Carney. Laid out for the press to inspect, next to a formidable array of RPG-2 grenade launchers and M-60 heavy machine guns, were Carney's religious vestments, a wooden chalice and a Bible. The Honduran Army also produced three emaciated "deserters" to fill in the details of the by-now familiar Sandinista conspiracy.

The foreign journalists, shuttled into Nueva Palestina aboard army helicopters, were skeptical. For several weeks, armed forces commander Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez had insisted on the existence of a Cuban-Nicaraguan conspiracy to infiltrate his country with 3,000 armed terrorists, but the few journalists who nosed around in Olancho found no evidence of a guer-

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collateral; they will get the collateral back as PIK payment. In effect, the government is paying farmers to grow the surplus that it will then use as a price support to offset the effects of large farm surpluses. (This was conceived in 1983, when the government realized it wasn't going to have enough commodities to meet its PIK obligations.) There is also a \$50,000 ceiling on all payments, including the value of the commodities to be given out.

The Reagan Administration has tried to solve the farm subsidy problem with an expensive and ineffective program that enmeshes it in a new Big Government tangle. Down on the farm, as elsewhere, the Administration caters to the rich while ignoring the needs of the poor. □

Father Carney

(Continued From Front Cover)

rilla presence. Other troubling questions remained. Why was Reyes Mata's body not produced for the Honduran tabloids, which clamor incessantly for corpses? And what of Father Carney? Where were the witnesses to his death?

The first person to comment on the missing facts was the soft-spoken Superior of the Jesuits in Honduras, the Spanish-born Rev. José María (Chema) Tojeira, whose doubts coincided with those of the Carney family in the United States. The family began an investigation, making two trips to Honduras and keeping up a stream of telephone calls and letters to the State Department. They grew restive, however, at the reluctance of American officials to challenge the Honduran military's version of the events. After his first trip to Tegucigalpa, Carney's brother-in-law, St. Louis psychologist Joe Connolly, confided to us, "I think there is a real chance that the United States is up to its neck in this."

Our investigation leads us to believe that Connolly's fears were well founded. There is compelling evidence that U.S. officials played along with an elaborate Honduran cover-up of the facts. Worse, there are strong suggestions that U.S. intelligence and military personnel took part in the Honduran combat operations and may have been present when Father Carney died.

Father Carney's family had learned to live with the possibility of his death. He had spoken often enough of its likelihood and was the first to admit that his direct and plain-spoken attachment to liberation theology had won him few friends among either the Catholic hierarchy or the Honduran military.

His first Honduran parish, in 1964, was the run-down

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banana and railroad town of El Progreso, one of those mockingly named outposts that abound in Central America. He lived with an austerity that startled even his Jesuit superiors, leading one fellow missionary to recall that working with Carney "was like being with Jesus Christ." For fifteen years Carney defied the military. He worked with the national peasant union, ANACH, until 1979, when the military regime decided it had had enough, stripped him of the Honduran citizenship he had acquired in 1973 and threw him out of the country. Carney wound up in revolutionary Nicaragua, where he worked closely with the Maryknoll Sisters and became parish priest of San Juan de Limay; but he fretted about getting back to Honduras, which he continued to regard as home.

Eventually Carney found a way to return—as unofficial chaplain on a mission of the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers-Honduras (PRTC-H). In the alphabet soup of Central American rebel groups it was relatively small and obscure, but in Honduras, even a small group can make a splash. By early 1983, José María Reyes Mata was in Managua as supreme commander of the PRTC-H, planning to drive a column into eastern Honduras and form a base of peasant support to start the Honduran revolution. As PRTC-H propaganda made clear, the rebels would have to contend with four armies—the Honduran, the Salvadoran (receiving U.S. training at Puerto Castilla, Honduras), the American and the *contra*. It was a bizarre and hapless exercise for just ninety-six men.

The 40-year-old Reyes Mata had fought with Che Guevara's National Liberation Army in Bolivia, which made him a minor legend to some Central American leftists, an outdated crank to others. As a strategist, he still had one foot planted in the *foquismo* of the 1960s, a theory which



called for isolated bands of guerrillas to disappear into the wilds to spark revolution. The Sandinistas, by now hard-pressed by the C.I.A.-backed *contras*, had mixed feelings about his adventure. Some may have given him limited support, but most discouraged the PRTC-H operation.

On or around July 19, 1983 (the fourth anniversary of the Nicaraguan revolution), the Sandinista military must have looked the other way as Reyes Mata's guerrillas crossed a major war zone in full battle gear and made their way to Honduran soil. Accompanying them was Father Guadalupe Carney. Survivors of the band say Father Carney and Reyes Mata argued continually as they trudged up and down the forested hillsides. Reyes Mata, ever dogmatic in his Marxism, argued that the celebration of mass had no place in a guerrilla war; Carney, the liberation theologian, insisted that a priest was needed to minister to the guerrillas' spiritual needs.

What actually happened during the next two months? There is little in the story the army told at Nueva Palestina that can be independently verified. On August 1, guerrilla survivors and military sources agree, two deserters turned themselves in to the army at Catacamas and revealed the whereabouts of the column, which by that time had established its base camp, code-named Congolón. By August 4, an army counterinsurgency unit had set up headquarters at Nueva Palestina. In the next four weeks, the army says, it tracked down the guerrillas in the mountains of the Cordillera Entre Rios.

In the rugged terrain east of Nueva Palestina, the army claims, it engaged the rebels in a series of four firefights. The first was on August 28; subsequent ones occurred on September 3 and 11. The last, in which Reyes Mata supposedly died, took place between 5 P.M. and 7 P.M. on September 18. By 10 o'clock the next morning, the army was ready to break the big news at the Nueva Palestina press conference. It was a skillful diversionary exercise—what Hondurans, at a loss for a precise Spanish term, call "*un show*."

But the army's account is challenged by local journalists. On September 14, families of Honduran soldiers had told one reporter for Radio América that Reyes Mata was in custody, alive. Manuel Gamero, editor of the Tegucigalpa daily *Tiempo*, recalls that the army invited him to Nueva Palestina for the press conference around 2 P.M. on September 18—several hours before the death it was called to announce allegedly took place. The army's version is also contradicted by information gleaned from a five-hour interview we had with PRTC-H survivors. The specific details of their story tally strikingly with accounts from local church and human rights sources.

The guerrillas admit that their forces were in deep trouble from the moment the first two deserters broke ranks on August 1. Within days, the group's leaders learned from the radio that their location was known. Nueva Palestina is the only village in the area, and by August 4 it was occupied by troops of the Patuca Task Force. That cut the guerrillas off from their food supply.

Almost immediately, Reyes Mata decided to break up the

Congolón camp. While one group, which included Father Carney, stayed close to Nueva Palestina, a second headed north along the Patuca River. On August 28, an army patrol located the Reyes Mata-Carney group, and a single firefight ensued. The group was by that time in dreadful physical shape, subsisting on jungle vegetation, according to survivors. By September 4, the straggling remnants of that group had been tracked down.

That day, armed forces commander Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martínez arrived in Nueva Palestina to take charge. On September 5 local residents reported the arrival at El Aguacate air base of a large helicopter carrying Alvarez. During August, Nicaraguan *contras* had begun to use El Aguacate as a supply depot, and U.S. Army engineers had moved in to extend the dirt airstrip to 8,000 feet. That task brought well-paid work to a number of impoverished local men. In early September two of them told their families that they had seen a number of prisoners brought to El Aguacate under guard. Among them was a man they recognized from photographs in the newspapers as José María Reyes Mata. Soldiers soon warned the workmen not to talk anymore.

The task of Alvarez and other interrogators at El Aguacate was clear: to locate the second PRTC-H column, which had eluded the Nueva Palestina dragnet. They must have broken the prisoners efficiently, for on the same day a second task force was dispatched to the village of Rio Tinto, ten miles northeast of El Aguacate and sixty miles northeast of Nueva Palestina. According to the PRTC-H, guerrilla units clashed with the army on September 7, 11, 16 and 20 at various points along a small jungle tributary, the Wasparasni, and in the chain of hills called the Montañas de Capapán. At least sixteen guerrillas died.

Some were taken prisoner: among them, Armando Moncada, Oswaldo Castro and José Rafael Duarte, the three presented as deserters at the September 19 Nueva Palestina press show. They too were interned and interrogated at El Aguacate. They cannot confirm the exact date of their capture, for all three are now dead.

U.S. intelligence personnel were fully involved in the Honduran Army's operation. In a letter to the Carney family dated December 7, 1983, the State Department explained:

According to the Honduran government, it first knew of the guerrillas on August 1st when two deserters appeared in Catacamas. It shared this information with the U.S. Defense Attaché's office. During the Honduran military's operation against the guerrillas, the U.S. Defense Attaché assisted in debriefing the guerrillas.

That admission means U.S. intelligence personnel had seven weeks to interrogate the detainees. Yet the letter claims that only after the Nueva Palestina press conference did the embassy realize that Father Carney, a U.S. citizen, had been with the guerrillas. How could the interrogations have possibly failed to elicit that information?

Congress has an explicit understanding with the Administration that U.S. forces on maneuvers in Honduras will not be present in combat zones. Nevertheless, the U.S. Southern Command admits that 150 American troops, most of them

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Army Rangers from Fort Lewis, Washington, were parachuted into Olancho on August 5. They stayed until August 16, engaging in what the Pentagon called a "simulated counterinsurgency operation" with Honduran forces. August 5 was the day after the Honduran Army's Patuca Task Force arrived in Olancho on its real counterinsurgency mission.

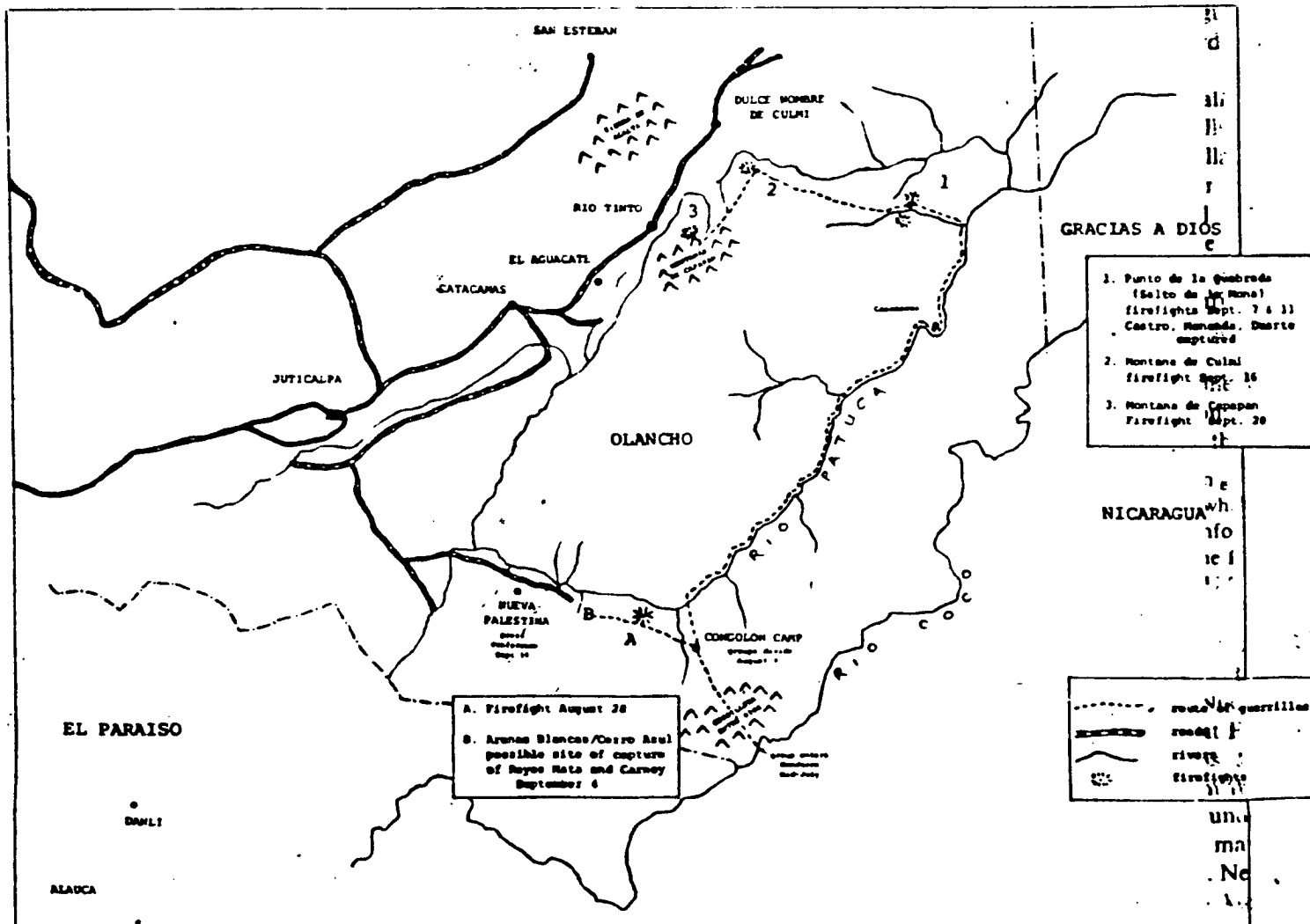
On September 9, five UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters of the 101st Airborne Division were spotted moving suspiciously in eastern Honduras, according to U.S. news reports between September 20 and 28. American officers close to the operation told CBS News on September 20 that "the Blackhawks were transporting Honduran troops into the combat area and running reconnaissance flights for them." The Pentagon denied that report and claimed the choppers were bringing food supplies for refugees, presumably Miskito Indians from Nicaragua. But on September 27, Col. James Strachan, public affairs officer in Tegucigalpa for the U.S. Southern Command, told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that U.S. helicopters had, in fact, provided transport for Honduran counterinsurgency troops on September 9. He took pains to point out, however, that they had no connection with the fighting around Nueva Palestina, which, he said, was in an entirely different location.

The State Department did not provide a precise account

of the Blackhawk incident until it dispatched its letter to the Carney family in December:

On September 9th, five U.S. helicopters transported 50 Honduran troops from Dulcena to a location north east of Dulce Nombre de Culmi. . . . [They] were also authorized to carry out the Honduran government's request that Honduran 5th Battalion soldiers be transported . . . to prevent the guerrillas from escaping along the lower Patuca river to the Mosquitia region. These Honduran soldiers did not participate in combat activity against the guerrillas.

As Strachan had, the letter stressed that the U.S. soldiers "were 150 kilometers distant from the Cordillera Entre Rios region in Olancho where the skirmishes took place" or at least where the Honduran Army says they took place. That version of events exonerates U.S. forces from charges of direct combat involvement in September, but its accuracy is suspect. The guerrillas' story of battles along the Wasparasni River and in the Capapan area places the 101st Airborne Division in the middle of the combat area. Dulce Nombre de Culmi, at the northern end of the Capapan area, is the next town up the road from El Aguacate and Rio Tinto, where a second Honduran Army task force began operating on September 5. That date is important. The Blackhawks flew their mission on September 9, just two days after the guerrillas say they were first engaged in battle on



the Wasparasni. The precise spot, known as the Salto de la Mona, is, as the Pentagon says, almost 150 kilometers northeast of Nueva Palestina.

One senior Honduran military officer who is close to General Alvarez and who has insisted on anonymity assigns an even greater role to the helicopters. U.S. military advisers, he says, played a command and control role in the counterinsurgency sweep, relaying information by radio to ground troops.

Perhaps most serious, there are strong suggestions that U.S. personnel involved with the Nicaraguan *contras* may have taken part in events leading up to the death in custody of Father Carney and other prisoners.

The Carney family arrived in Tegucigalpa on September 28. On September 30 and October 4, they met with all but six of the imprisoned survivors of the PRTC-H guerrilla column, hoping that someone might be able to shed light on Carney's death. The long interview sessions yielded little hard information.

On their return to the United States, the family wrote to General Alvarez, asking, among other questions, why they had been allowed to meet with only fifteen of the twenty-one guerrilla survivors. His reply, dated November 11, was illuminating; he explained that those six detainees

were participating during those days in patrol operations with the Patuca Task Force, as guides to find arms caches. To our surprise, these individuals, in whom much confidence had been placed, tried to escape as a group at dawn on October 3, 1983, . . . causing a skirmish in which they lost their lives.

The letter gave no names. Meanwhile, for almost two months, the anxious families of the missing detainees had pressed the army to explain why their visiting rights had been canceled. Finally, on November 25, the army gave the Honduran press an official identification of three of the men who had been "shot trying to escape." They were Moncada, Castro and Duarte, the "deserters" presented at the Nueva Palestina press conference. The three may have been prevented from telling the Carney family what they knew, but the army failed to silence them completely. Castro had talked to his relatives during a prison visit, and

FOOTNOTE ON AN HISTORIC CASE: IN RE ALGER HISS

This just-published booklet by author William A. Reuben identifies 114 factual errors in the Federal District Court of New York's 1982 decision upholding Hiss's conviction for perjury in 1950. This flawed decision, upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1983, stands as the last legal word on one of the most celebrated cases in modern history. 1 copy \$5, 10 copies \$40, 50 copies \$150, 100 copies \$250. Make checks payable to The Nation Institute and send to "Hiss," The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

his testimony about what he had learned at El Aguacate was close to smuggled out to the Christian Human Rights Commission Patuca Ri of Honduras, in Olancho, which released it at a press conference in Mexico City in early October.

According to the document, El Aguacate was a C.I.A.ing on junc Nicaraguan Democratic Force headquarters, and Casispremer knew names:

In that place, the North American advisers Lieutenant West Blank and Major Mark Kelvi [sic] have been identified. These North Americans were directly involved in the torture and interrogation, which culminated in the cowardly murder of the priest James Carney (Father Guadalupe) and of other revolutionary leaders. These actions, executed in the middle of September, took place in two secret underground cells, which function in the fort of El Aguacate, where the FDN also stores war materiel supplied by the CIA. General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez participated directly in various interrogation sessions before the prisoners were killed.

Later events confirmed the role of El Aguacate as an important base for the *contras*. On October 3, an ancient DC-3 carrying supplies from El Aguacate to F.D.N. rebels crashed—or was shot down—over the Nicaraguan province of Jinotega. Hugo Reynaldo Aguilar Méndez, co-pilot of the DC-3 and former captain in the National Guard, of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, told a Managua press conference that El Aguacate—known by the code name Lobo Loco ("Crazy Wolf")—was shared during August and September by F.D.N. forces, C.I.A. operatives and Honduran infantry troops on a counterinsurgency mission in Olancho.

Aguilar said that his work had brought him in frequent contact with senior U.S. intelligence agents at the base, though he knew only their first names. He identified the top C.I.A. agent at El Aguacate as a man named West, "heavily built, with a tough character," about 55 years old. Aguilar said that West held the rank of major, though the plane's pilot, former National Guard Maj. Roberto Amador, thought he was a colonel. They agreed that West spoke little or no Spanish and that the C.I.A. was planning to replace him with a "Tex-Mex." Aguilar and Amador identified West's second-in-command at El Aguacate as a man in his mid-20s named Mark, whose nickname was El Huesito ("Little Bone"). No further evidence has come to light about the C.I.A. presence at El Aguacate, and U.S. officials decline to make any comment on it.

And so the family of Father James Carney still has no certain knowledge of how he died. Nor may they ever. U.S. Ambassador to Honduras John Dimitri Negroponte suggests that the family begin looking for him in Nicaragua, where the rebel drive started. In an interview in February, the Ambassador insisted, "We have been asked to find out what has happened to a U.S. citizen, and that is what we are doing." But Ambassador Negroponte's position as overseer of the Reagan Administration's "secret" war does not allow him even to acknowledge the existence of many of the circumstances that surround Carney's death. Their ultimate revelation could be the stubborn priest's last service to his adopted country.